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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 07 VILNIUS 001532

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR CA/EX, EUR/EX, EUR/NB, OIG/ISP, M/FSI/SPAS,
CA/VO,CA/FPP AND CA/OCS
AMCONSUL FRANKFURT FOR RCO BARBARA L. ARMSTRONG

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [CMGT](#) [CVIS](#) [CASC](#) [CPAS](#) [KFRD](#) [ASIG](#) [AFSI](#) [LH](#)

SUBJECT: FY2004 CONSULAR PACKAGE NARRATIVE FOR VILNIUS

REF(S): State 227856

1. Post submits the following consular package narrative keyed to reftel.

Management

A) Consular Section Chief: Ruta D. Elvikis (Consul),
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B) Do you have sufficient staff to meet consular MPP objectives? (If you believe you do not, describe steps you have taken to maximize staff efficiency. Note any special circumstances at your post that hinder productivity. Specify the number, type, and grade of personnel you would need in order to fully meet MPP objectives). Add any comments you might have on the effectiveness of training of new personnel (such as Congen, FSI language training, etc.)

Response: Post at this time has adequate staff to do consular work in accordance with MPP objectives and current consular regulations and procedures. Post's Vice-Consuls are currently able to handle all NIV interviews. Meeting consular MPP objectives will be a challenge over the next three months, however, as we face the extended absence of the Consul from January 1 through April 1, early departure at the end of January of one Vice Consul not to be replaced until March 1, and rotation of our second Vice Consul in mid-February. Promised TDY assistance from the Department will help us bridge this gap. The most challenging month will be in March, when we begin processing our large Work and Travel program (see description below), which will require the processing of more than 3000 visas between March and June. In addition, post's Consular Associate departed post at the end of July 2004 and has yet to be replaced pending budget approval. A CA would help the section fulfill MPP objectives, such as assisting American citizens, as the Section's Vice-Consuls focus on processing Work and Travel visas.

Post is experiencing an increase in the number of Americans traveling to and residing in Lithuania. Our back-up ACS assistant is more often required to assist the full-time assistant with our increasing ACS workload. As such, we are considering re-designating the back-up ACS assistant as a half-time ACS assistant, while considering the need for an additional position in ACS to allow better service for the growing American community in Lithuania. This staffing change in ACS would assist post in meeting its MPP goals.

Regarding training, Congen has traditionally offered new consular officers a solid foundation in consular work. However, rapid changes in regulations and procedures are a challenge for all consular section staff. Consular officers in the field would greatly benefit from additional training, even if only online, in SAO processing requirements and working with the TAL. Given the many changes in consular work, post would also recommend some sort of refresher training for all consular officers between overseas assignments.

Post would further recommend that JO's assigned to Vilnius receive 30 weeks of language rather than 24. Solid knowledge of Lithuanian is absolutely necessary at

the visa window and, despite the excellent FSI Lithuanian language program, 24 weeks is sometimes not enough time to get a good grasp on the complexities of this extremely difficult language.

C) Do you have sufficient space to meet consular MPP objectives? (If you believe you do not, describe the nature of the space limitations. Note steps post has taken to address these limitations, including development of design proposals, allocation of post funds, requests for OBO or CA funding, etc.)
Response: The Consular Section is adequate for the current level of staffing. The greatest difficulty for consular operations is that the Vice-Consuls do not have office space in the Consular Section, physically isolating them from daily operations during non-interview hours. Their offices are located down the hall from the Consular Section in the Chancery. Space will become more of an issue with the Section's move into temporary swing space sometime in FY2006 for the duration of the Chancery expansion project. The swing space is slightly smaller than the Section's current space, resulting in a smaller waiting area, loss of one interview window, loss of a privacy booth, and less space for storage of consular files. Current estimates have the Consular Section located in this swing space for approximately a year.

D) Describe any management practices (such as off-site fee collection, use of a user pays call center, courier passback, post hosted web appointment system, business programs) that post has instituted in the past year. Are these management practices effective? Also please list any management practices that have been discontinued in the past year, citing reasons for the termination.

Response: N/A.

E) Please advise whether and why post might benefit from a Consular Management Assistance Team (CMAT) visit. If a CMAT visited your post over the past year, please summarize any benefits and what steps, if any, could be taken to further enhance the productivity of CMAT visits.

Response: Post is fortunate to have available the guidance of an experienced RCO, who, in her most recent visit, offered many of the same benefits as a CMAT. Consequently, while we would welcome the visit of a CMAT, we do not believe that post should be considered a priority at this time.

Systems:

F) Do you have the equipment you need to meet consular MPP objectives? (If you believe you do not, describe the equipment you need and efforts you have made to obtain it.)

Response: At this time, post has the equipment it needs.

G) How would you rate your consular section's satisfaction with the automated consular systems (excellent, good, average, poor)? Are there any unresolved software or hardware issues? How do you rate the training of post personnel both within the consular section and in Management/IM on the use and support of Consular systems (excellent, good, average, poor)? What types of assistance would you need from the next training and refresher teams coming from the consular systems division to assist consular system users? Please also comment on the quality of assistance provided by the CA Overseas Help Desk.

Response: We rate the ACS system as poor. The warden information is unwieldy and impractical to use for notifications, particularly with the advent of alternative methods of notification such as email. This is made even more complicated by the fact that IBRS does not interface with the warden database in ACS and vice versa. Consular Section staff generally rate NIV as good and user-friendly. We like the new SAO capability and look forward to the day when it is entirely electronic.

An Orkand team was here in August for biometric installation as well as refresher training. In addition to providing excellent training on all the various consular systems and biometric collection, the team provided invaluable support for our public relations campaign to roll out the new program. Thanks to its help, which included participating in press interviews about the equipment and setting up a demonstration workstation for the press, post's rollout was a

tremendous success. The Consular Section is generally satisfied with the support received from Management/IM but wishes that that office had more time to devote to consular systems issues. Due to other demands on IM's time, the Consular Section has had to wait a week or more for installation of new software or hardware. We are pleased that a member of post's IM staff was able to receive formal training on consular systems. We are also satisfied with the support we have received from the CA Overseas Help Desk. Its replies have been timely and useful. We particularly appreciated their most recent assistance in quickly adding NATO visas to our NIV visa table in time for Lithuania's first NATO staff member to travel to the United States.

H) Some posts have recently begun scanning 2-D barcodes to input DS-156 information into consular systems. Please comment on other forms you would like to see automated and explain why.

Response: No comment at this time.

ACS:

I) What aspects of your ACS work are the most demanding?

Response: As more Americans choose to travel to or reside in Lithuania, post's ACS workload, from routine notarials to jail visits, continues to increase. Our full-time ACS assistant increasingly requires the help of our back-up ACS assistant just to handle our day-to-day workload.

Another challenging aspect of our ACS work is Federal Benefits. In FY2004, we finally received permission from SSA to re-enroll non-U.S. citizen beneficiaries based on an exchange of notes with the GOL in early 2003. It took substantial time to locate surviving eligible beneficiaries and process their paperwork. Embassy Warsaw provided invaluable assistance in facilitating their re-enrollment, enabling payment of benefits to begin promptly. Although the total number of new beneficiaries was relatively small, it did add to our FBU workload, which is already significant and continues to grow, due largely to the number of Lithuanian-Americans who return to Lithuania as a way to stretch their pension dollars. The conference for FBU FSNs held last year in Warsaw provided great training for our FBU assistant. We hope it was the first of many more such regional FBU conferences.

Visas:

K) What aspects of your NIV work are the most demanding?

Response: The decline in post's NIV applications seems to have finally leveled off. Despite the relatively low number of total applications compared to our peak in 2000, post's NIV workload remains high. Lithuanians continue to look to the United States for illegal work even after Lithuanian accession into the EU (see Vilnius 01493). Unfortunately, Lithuania's EU accession has made it more difficult for us to ascertain a visa applicant's periods of stay in the United States as border officials no longer stamp the passports of returning Lithuanians. As we still do not have access to DHS entry/exit records, Lithuanian entry stamps were our only sure means of detecting repeated six-month stays, which often is a sign of illegal employment in the United States.

We also continue to see a great deal of fraud, including forged Burroughs and Teslin foil visas and imposter travelers. There are a number of ongoing investigations in Lithuania's second city of Kaunas involving fraudulent documents and imposter passports and visas, with links to counterfeit currency. We work closely with RSO and local authorities on these investigations. The level and increasing sophistication of fraud continues to be the most demanding aspect of NIV work in Lithuania. We are continually frustrated that these same rings after their arrests are quickly back in business in some modified form. The increased time spent in interviewing to screen for fraud, new processing requirements, and the increase in the number of applicants seen at post who were either refused change of status by DHS, turned around or deported due to prior violations, or who have serious hits in CLASS have increased not only the complexity of the visa process but also the overall time necessary to handle post's relatively small NIV workload. Another demanding aspect of NIV work at post is the Work and Travel program. Lithuania has one of the largest per capita participation rates in Eastern Europe. Post processed 2,100 Work and Travel visas in FY2004, approximately 27 percent of all visas issued by post in that year. This is a decrease from

last year's totals, due to competition from programs in the U.K. Organizers are hoping to submit at least as many Work and Travel applicants in 2005. As these visas are all processed over a short period of time (from March to June), this places a great strain on every aspect of NIV processing at post. The perennial demands on Section resources of universal interviewing, fraud screening, and the risk of printer failure are joined this year by the challenges posed by the planned absence of the Consul and the timing of the Vice-Consuls' rotations. Post has developed strategies to handle the anticipated challenges.

M) Please comment on the impact that the fingerprinting requirement has had on consular space, processing time, and relations with your host country.

Response: Post only began fingerprinting on August 23, 2004. Our limited experience with fingerprinting has been positive. We had anticipated a negative backlash from the Lithuanian public based on local media reaction in the early days of the program. With the cooperation of post's PD section, Front Office, the Orkand installation team (as noted above), and some good local contacts, we had a successful media event for the biometric rollout. During that event, four "Famous Fingers" demonstrated the fingerprinting procedure, and the Deputy Director of the Lithuanian Consular Department explained the future of biometrics. The campaign succeeded, as the transition to fingerprinting went without a hitch. A number of Lithuanians holding valid visas even called the Embassy to ask if they could have their fingers scanned anyway.

From the workload perspective, the switch to fingerprinting has had little impact on our operations. We have only occasionally experienced long delays with IDENT returns, but never so long as to disrupt our workflow. There has been no real impact on consular space.

N) What aspects of your IV work are the most demanding? (Discussion should address any backlogs and their causes).

Response: Though Vilnius does not process immigrant visas, we accept petitions for immediate relatives, usually marriage or fiance petitions. The number of petitions we received has doubled in the last year. We continue to see cases of suspected marriage fraud. Approximately 10 percent of the petitions received at post in FY2004 were not clearly approvable. The decline in fraudulent marriages seen at post is most likely a benefit of EU accession, with young Lithuanian women, the usual participant in such schemes, now looking for opportunities in Europe rather than in the United States.

O) If applicable, please describe the impact of the DV program on your workload.

Response: Lithuanians are very interested in the DV program, and every year the consular section receives a large number of inquiries about the process. The availability of information on the Internet and through our pre-recorded phone message has reduced the number of phone and written inquiries to post about the program. We are affected by the program in two ways. First, we continue to receive a large number of press inquiries every year; second, we receive many requests from Embassy Warsaw, our regional DV processing post, for assistance in conducting fraud checks of Lithuanian documentation, in particular fraudulent diplomas, submitted in support of DV applications. The resources necessary to assist Warsaw with these checks place an additional burden on our fraud unit.

P) What percentage of your NIV and IV applicants are third country nationals (TCN)? From what countries are they? Do they speak a different language than post's designated language? If so, how do you communicate with them?

Response: Only seven percent of NIV applications at post are non-Lithuanian citizens. The vast majority of these are citizens of Russia, mostly seamen from the Kaliningrad region. While many speak at least some English, about half speak only Russian. Almost the entire FSN staff speaks fluent Russian, and those not fluent are at least proficient. They interpret for the interviewing officers as needed.

Passport:

Q) Discuss how your post has been affected by the Overseas Photodigitized Passports program (OPDP) deployed in 2003. Please note any major adjustments you have had to make to workflow or staffing. Has the number of emergency passports issued at post decreased? If so, by

how much?

Response: Post continues to be pleased with the improvement of service following implementation of OPDP. Customers are especially appreciative of this improvement in service. This faster turnaround has resulted in a decrease in the already small number of emergency passports post issues, down more than half from FY2003.

Fraud Prevention:

R) Briefly summarize the types of fraud most frequently encountered at post and programs in place to combat that fraud, including use of investigation resources, tracking systems, electronic tools, liaison and information sharing. If post has conducted a validation study, what was learned from it? Are you satisfied with the level of fraud prevention training for officers and FSNs? If not, what do you believe you need to support your efforts in this area? Do you conduct in-house fraud training for non-Embassy consular contacts? If so, who is the targeted audience and how often is it done? Do local authorities effectively prosecute document vendors and smugglers?

Response: Visa fraud in Lithuania has changed markedly in the last few years. Fraudulent job letters and bank letters are increasingly rare. As we improved our detection of these documents with access to the Lithuanian Social Insurance Agency's (SoDra) database to confirm income declarations and use of the InfoBankas corporate record database, mala fide applicants have turned to other, more sophisticated techniques. We continue to receive reports of fake Burroughs and Teslin MRV visas. While the number of interception reports from airport officials has decreased, this may indicate that the quality of false documents has improved. We are also receiving reports of Lithuanians seeking entry into the U.S. on imposter or photo-subbed passports. This is especially difficult for Lithuanian authorities to address as the aliens, having used their real passport for departure, have broken no laws in Lithuania. Local authorities recently located and shut down a visa "facilitator" who had a binder full of hundreds of photos from legitimate travel documents with valid U.S. visas from which travelers could select the best likeness. Post is working closely with investigators to identify those to whom the travel documents were originally issued as well as those who may have fraudulently used them. The investigation may take years but prosecutors are not optimistic that the document purveyors will actually do jail time.

The Lithuanian Border Police are very helpful in our fraud efforts, but the information and assistance provided by the Criminal Police is not very specific nor responsive to post's concerns. Post continues to work to strengthen its relationships with local law enforcement authorities. We continue to work closely with RSO to further improve information sharing with local authorities. DHS Copenhagen has been of great assistance in a number of investigations, running checks through its systems in addition to sharing their expertise.

The results of post's last B1/B2 validation study, completed in early 2004, showed definite improvement from the previous year's study with a 57 percent return rate. Most unusual in this year's study was the significant number of visa holders (23 percent) who had not yet used their visas. One possible explanation is that many applicants obtained U.S. visas on the eve of Lithuania's EU accession "just in case." Some Lithuanians were nervous about the effect accession would have on the local economy and, for all the promise of opportunities for legal work within the EU, others continue to look to the United States for work opportunities, legal or otherwise. More than six months since Lithuania's EU accession, we still see just as many potential economic migrants despite the possibility for legal work elsewhere.

Post's fraud prevention staff currently consists of one full-time Anti-Fraud investigator and is managed by the Consul. Our part-time fraud assistant is currently acting as our full-time Anti-Fraud investigator during the investigator's extended leave. She is assisted in anti-fraud efforts and investigations by all Section staff as necessary. Neither she nor any of the American officers currently at post have had specific anti-fraud training. The opportunity for both our local and American staff to obtain such training would no doubt enhance our anti-fraud efforts. Despite the expertise of our AFI and extensive fraud files, we still too often find ourselves ill-equipped to investigate large, and increasingly sophisticated, organized fraud rings. Post

has developed a fraud database that will assist us in identifying commonalities, analyzing trends, and in detecting organized fraud. The ability to access immigration systems such as NIIS and NAILS ourselves would greatly strengthen our efforts. Post would also like increased opportunities to attend regional fraud conferences and to see more sharing of regional fraud information.

We had not felt the need to conduct in-house training for our local contacts, as they continue to demonstrate an aptitude for detecting fraudulent documents, thanks in large part to excellent training provided by DHS Copenhagen in the last two years. We do, however, provide informal orientations on U.S. documents for our Consular colleagues. As it has been several years, though, the Consular Section and RSO would like to bring DHS here for another round of training with the Lithuanian Border Guard, as well as prosecutors and the Consular Department, who were not included in prior training sessions.

General:

S) Describe country conditions that affect your ability to provide consular services (infrastructure, fraud, political setting, etc.).

Response: Since Lithuania regained its independence in 1991, over 500,000 Lithuanians have reportedly left the country, many of them to the United States where a sizeable Lithuanian community already exists. The Lithuanian government does little to discourage this exodus, as many politicians are convinced that the majority of Lithuanians will eventually return, better and richer for their time spent overseas. While the Lithuanian economy continues to grow rapidly, not all groups benefit equally from the growth. This factor, and the fact that most young Lithuanians desire to work abroad despite their country's excellent growth prospects, contribute to continuing emigration. These factors will continue to drive post's NIV work, and refusal rate, in the future. Immigration to Lithuania from both the EU and non-EU world, for both legitimate and illegitimate reasons, will continue to increase. Significant numbers of illegal aliens continue to be apprehended at the Lithuanian-Belarusian border and in the port of Klaipeda. The influx of non-Lithuanians has already led to a small increase in the number of TCN applicants seen at post. This number will most likely increase further over the next few years and will require greater vigilance in the screening of NIV applications.

Integration has already increased emigration from Lithuania to Western Europe, as Lithuanians seek opportunities for legal foreign employment, though this has not diminished the demand for visas to the United States. Despite Lithuania's membership in the EU, we have not yet seen the quality of visa cases improve, as economic growth continues to leave certain sectors of society behind.

Now that Lithuania is officially part of Europe, but with a cost of living still far below its Western neighbors, tourism will continue to increase. More American visitors, coupled with a likely increase in the number of people who choose to settle in Lithuania, will further increase the demand for section services.

T) Describe any other issue not raised in the preceding questions that you believe to be significant to the consular section's effectiveness in handling its responsibilities.

Response: Post is planning for a major physical expansion of the Chancery with construction scheduled to begin in FY2006. The Consular Section will continue to work with other elements of the Mission to ensure that our space concerns are considered in the final plans. Two additional stories will be constructed above the current Consular Section. During that construction, the Consular Section will be moved into swing space in another building. The space is slightly smaller than our current quarters. While OBO has been working with the Consular Section to meet our needs, this temporary inconvenience will pose challenges for the Consular Section, which we are confident we will manage successfully.

MULL